Tear me apart and eat me alive (and yet I will forgive you)

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Tear me apart and eat me alive (and yet I will forgive you)

by Chaosandaroace

Summary

The more Etho thought about it, the more he realized what was really going on.

Everybody on the ship didn't inexplicably trust each other to not be imposters, everybody was imposters.

They just knew that they were on the same team, so there was no threat to be feared.

Which made Etho the only crewmate.

The newest one, in a position on a ship that barely anybody had heard about, never mind thought about.

He was going to die.

The fact was suddenly becoming all too real, and all too clear.

Aka:

Etho is a crewmate who newly joined the spaceship Hermitcraft. Things are going well, until he realizes that Bdubs, as well as the rest of the crew are imposters, and he is the only crewmate. Surely this means he is going to die and get eaten, because what other explanation could there possibly be?

Chapter 1: The realization

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Etho was just aimlessly scrolling thought job-postings when he came across it.

Life had been pretty hectic ever since graduating from school, with hours spent looking at places with suitable positions and their pay.

The ever-present threat that imposters posed the minute you joined a ship didn't exactly help either.

Despite best efforts, the company that paid for the jobs had no real way of detecting them before it was too late, and the ship was empty with nothing but corpses.

If that wasn't bad enough, the paranoia that came with the threat meant people were quick to start pointing fingers. Even when nothing had happened.

Etho had heard horror stories about whole crews decimating each other, despite not a single imposter ever being present.

Which meant Etho had passed up jobs on the more infamous ships. What good was the pay if he wasn't going to live to enjoy it?

And that was not mentioning the paranoia that came with boarding a ship where multiple people had been killed by imposters already.

So, when Etho found a small ship called 'Hermitcraft', with no known casualties and crew that had worked there for years, he was ecstatic.

This was exactly what he had been looking for.

The pay was alright, but the risk of an imposter was extremely low after so many years with the same crew, and Etho really needed a place to work where he wasn't scared he was going to die all the time.

He sent in his CV almost immediately.

After a couple of back and forth, a conversation with the captain, Xisuma, and what had to be an extensive background check, Etho had a job and a place to call home.

The 'Hermitcraft' was a strange place in the beginning.

Under Xisuma, the tasks were no longer rigorously monitored like at the academy, where even a single misstep was reprimanded, because out there this would certainly mean death and suspicion.

Xisuma didn’t seem to agree.

People traded tasks, others picked up when someone was feeling unwell. The hermits trusted each other.

After many a horror story, the unspoken air of calmness and faith in each other felt good. Felt safe.

Etho had been scared he would feel like an outsider, coming into this already existing group of close-knit friends.

Then Bdubs happened and Etho felt almost silly for worrying.

Before he knew it he chatted with Xisuma, gossiped with Cleo, and was getting talked into shenanigans with Scar.

Long forgotten were fears of imposters or paranoia, replaced with a deep-seated feeling of safety and love.

It was a tragedy really, when it all came tumbling down.

The worst part about it was the fact he wasn’t supposed even be there. Etho had told everyone he was heading to bed early, after spending hours arguing with the reactor.

It just wouldn't stop sputtering, no matter what he tried.

It sucked to be the only engineer on the ship with extensive enough knowledge to actually fix something, not just repair it for a little while.

At least it had stopped complaining so much now. Even if it wasn’t entirely fixed.

Etho was just going to grab a snack before heading to bed, when he spotted Bdubs in the hallway, humming to himself.

Etho hadn’t been spotted, and he decided that because of this, he was going to do a little bit of spying, just for fun. And potential blackmail.

You never know when things like that could come in handy.

That was why he hid, almost closing the door, only peaking out of a little crack. And that was why he didn’t make a sound as Bdubs stopped, doing his best to stay silent.

That was why he didn’t say anything as Bdubs double-checked he was alone.

Because this surely was going to be some A-tier blackmail.

So Etho stood there as Bdubs took of his helmet, as he opened a compartment Etho didn’t recognize.

He didn't think there was anything hidden in the walls of the hallways at all, except for fire safety.

He stood there as Bdubs quickly scanned his surroundings, before opening his mouth far too wide, revealing teeth far to sharp and a tongue far too long.

Etho froze, a scream trapped in his throat as Bdubs ate whatever it he was holding.

He couldn't move.

It couldn't be true. Bdubs couldn't be an imposter, there was no way. He was far too nice and welcoming.

This was all just a trick of the lighting, nothing more. Please, just let him blink and show it was just that.

It wasn't.

Etho stood there and watched as Bdubs devoured his meal, doing his best to not get spotted.

What had been hiding for some blackmail between friends had suddenly become life or death.

The worst part was that the longer Etho thought about it, the more sense it made.

He had never seen Bdubs eat before. The man always had some excuse waiting, everything from not being hungry to being too locked in.

It had been months.

Etho should have known.

He had to tell Xisuma. God, he had to tell him that Bdubs was an imposter.

Would they even believe him?

Bdubs had been there for years, while Etho was the newcomer, the one who was rocking the boat.

If he had been Xisuma, Etho certainly wouldn't have believed himself. Just thought he was an imposter lacking any kind of delicacy.

Etho would have voted himself out in an instant.

Bdubs started moving and Etho basically flung himself into his bed, praying that Bdubs didn't know he had been caught.

He lay there while the minutes ticked by, expecting Bdubs to barge in any moment.

Nothing happened.

While Etho laid there, he thought the case over.

The more that he thought about it, the more horror started to dawn on him.

Because while Bdubs had been a little suspicious at times, Etho had brushed it off, because everybody on the ship did.

Bdubs didn't eat with him, but neither did anyone else. Etho had just assumed it was how the ship worked and moved on.

Bdubs sometimes behaved strange around tasks, doing them jumbled or straight up wrong, while still getting the ship to work.

But why would that be strange, Xisuma called a task in engine the wrong name and almost broken something once and he was the captain.

Surely people could be forgiven for being a little forgetful.

Bdubs could get around uncannily fast, but so could both Xisuma and Scar. Even Cleo did at times. They had been here longer than Etho, maybe they just knew the ship better.

Bdubs didn't seem to struggle with the light suddenly going out, but Cleo practically acted like nothing had really changed at all.

Etho and Cleo even joked about that fact.

Bdubs did all sorts of sketchy things at night, but Scar was much, much worse, with even sillier excuses.

The more Etho thought about it, the more he realized what was really going on.

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They just knew that they were on the same team, so there was no threat to be feared.

Which made Etho the only crewmate.

The newest one, in a position on a ship that barely anybody had heard about, never mind thought about.

He was going to die.

The fact was suddenly becoming all too real, and all too clear.

Etho was thousands of miles away from home, with no-one to really miss him, on a ship filled with imposters.

He was probably only along for the ride as a snack.

God, what a horrendous thought.

But what else could it be?

No-one knew exactly what imposters were or why they killed crewmates, but it wasn't like they didn't have a good estimate.

They were food, simple enough.

Devoured to sustain the imposters. Some had even suggested that imposters needed to eat crewmates to survive, and that a single crewmate could last for months.

The food packs Ethos didn't know about probably helped, but once they were truly in the middle of nowhere, there would be no help to be found.

He couldn't call for help either, as Xisuma had control over all the communication.

Before the thought meant Etho skipped much tedious paperwork, now it meant contacting anyone was certain death.

There was no way out alive.

No matter how Etho tried, he was stuck on the 'Hermitcraft' until he died. Suddenly leaving would be suspicious, not that he could, with 2 more years still on his contract.

Contacting anyone would just get him killed. So would fighting back.

Which just left one option.

Go about his day as normal, and pretend like his last moments in this universe weren't fast approaching.

Everything else would just get him killed faster.

Etho didn't want to die. Even if it was just for a couple more weeks or even months, he wanted to stay alive as long as he could.

Besides, the hermits were nice, even if they were planning to kill him and then devour his body.

What it really so bad to just pretend a little longer?

To spend more time talking with Bdubs, and discussing repairs with Xisuma, and messing with Scar, and joking with Cleo.

Because even with everything, Etho couldn't find it in himself to hate them. They were too nice, they felt too much like family.

Etho would die for Bdubs, or any one of them.

The imposters needed to eat.

In the end, was there much of a difference how he went?

Death by starvation was a horrible fate. Were they really in the wrong for ensuring that they and their close friends didn't succumb to it?

Imposters killed by the dozens on ships, far beyond what could ever be considered possible to eat. They killed for sport and to not get overpowered by the crewmates.

Wasn't what they were doing to Etho much more humane?

Letting him become part of the crew, making sure that he could drop his shoulders, not jumping at every sound.

Taking care of him.

Making sure he ate, even when they couldn't eat with him. Even if it was only to ensure he would just be a tastier meal in the end.

Dying among friends was far from the worst way to go. Even if they were the ones to hold the knife.

Etho was certain Bdubs would make it quick if he asked. A slash to the throat and it would all be over.

It was better than most deaths by imposters.

Maybe he would even hold him close as he did it, whispering apologies while Etho were gurgling blood.

Slowly, Etho could feel the terror fading, as acceptance set in, numbing him and dulling his senses.

Later the next day when Bdubs would check up on him, worried since it was well over noon, Etho would let Bdubs drag him out of bed.

Let him chatter away as Bdubs tried to get Etho to eat something at least.

Would accept Xisuma slashing his tasks in half as the crew did their best to support him, not knowing they were what was dragging Etho down.

What they were going to do to him.

He told them he didn't want to talk about it as Scar tried scamming him into buying happiness, while Xisuma looked on, amused.

Etho let their efforts lift his spirits as he pushed the fear away.

He was going to die anyways, what use was there ruining his last weeks over that fact? This way, Hermitcraft would at least be worth it.

Chapter End Notes

Poor Etho, he is now scared for his life. And trying his best to rationalize away the fact that his friends are going to kill him and that is the only reason he is with them. Which he is scarily good at. If he only knew what was really going on.

Comments and kudos really give me motivation, so if you liked this/want more, please consider leaving one. Aslo, please tell me if I need to update any tags or add any cw for any of the chapters. I will do my best to add the appropriate ones, but I am only human after all.

Chapter 2: A lamb to the slaughter

Chapter Summary

> Etho is a little jumpy after his realization. Then O2 fails, and Etho realizes what is happening.

The first couple of weeks after the event, Etho had been on edge, expecting certain death to be waiting around any corner.

It was every single moment of hesitance from Bdubs, every time Xisuma called him to discuss repair to the ship. Every time Cleo asked to talk and Scar was being ominous.

Everything.

It never happened, of course. Because Bdubs had only forgotten something and the ship was always in need of some new repairs, so Xisuma had a lot to discuss.

Cleo just wanted to talk, and Scar was just like that.

Nothing was really out of the ordinary, even.

Etho had no signs to go off, no clue what would signal his life coming to a crashing halt. That didn't really help with the paranoia. If anything, it just made it worse.

Still, life moved on and Etho found it easier to pretend nothing was wrong.

The hermits never pressed either.

Bdubs would appear after finding whatever he was looking for and not mention the way Ethos eyes suddenly had become dazed, like he wasn't really all there.

He just talked gently until Etho came back again and offered support instead of distain, or confusion. Even when it was his food that was suddenly not functioning.

They never gave up on the plans either, and after a while Bdubs got used to helping ground Etho, and Etho got less scared when he suddenly left.

Once could certainly kill him, but the chances of the fiftieth time being different were getting kind of slim and ridiculous.

Xisuma singular meetings about the ship turned into weekly meetings as he certainly thought Etho had developed a fear of the ship breaking as every time they talked alone Etho was a pale white.

The rest of the crew did similar things.

That was the worst part about it. The way they all changed their routines and habits to help him.

Because the kind actions didn't really square with the horrifying reality.

Etho was treated as a friend, as someone important, who deserved kindness and accommodations and love.

Why would they do that to their food?

Etho tried not to think about it. Besides, it was more humane this way, and the hermits were nothing but humane.

Time passed and Etho told himself the signs would be visible. Stark in contrast of the hermits' usual actions.

Etho knew them now, certainly he would be able to tell when something finally changed. Even if it the change was only a subtle one.

There was no need to worry about nothing. Not when the hermits were nothing but pleasant. He mentally pushed the fear aside.

Still, he kept waiting.

For the sign, for the action, for the whispers he didn't hear.

Etho wasn't going to fight them, he had decided.

Even if he was nothing to them, they were everything to him and he couldn't bear to hurt them.

Besides, they had to care at least a little bit, right?

No-one who didn't would be so worried about his eating, and him zoning out, and stopping talking and his general wellbeing.

They were his friends, they were just hungry. Who could fault them for that?

Currently Etho was helping Bdubs with a task in electrical.

Bdubs was messing around as Etho tried without any avail to explain the task to him. Bdubs was failing miserably.

Really, how did Etho not notice anything sooner? Bdubs was horrible at this, he even called it the wrong thing after being corrected.

Etho was laughing while correcting the mismatch of wires. This was going to take some extra time, but he didn't really mind.

Handing out with Bdubs was fun, and it wasn't like Etho was swamped with tasks either.

Etho was in the middle of a fit of laughter as an announcement came over the coms.

"Oxygen levels depleting" the mechanical voice said.

Most of the lines had been replaced with either Xisumas or Scars voice, so the robotic voice felt unusual.

Etho dropped the wires as his heart started beating a little faster. O2 going down wasn't the end of the world, especially when everybody was friendly, at least for now, but it would be a hassle to fix afterwards.

That was not to mention the thought of not being able to breathe, which freaked him out an understandable amount.

It would be fine though.

He and Bdubs would make their way there now and fix it before anything could happen.

Etho turned to Bdubs, who was looking surprisingly relaxed for the severity of the announcement.

"Come, we need to fix O2" Etho said, a little urgency spilling into his voice.

This was silly. O2 would be fixed, besides, there was no way Xisuma hadn't installed a safety measure for this exact scenario.

Breathing was kind of important after all.

"Just give me a second. I need to finish this task" Bdubs replied.

Etho sighed, before going over to look at the task in question. Which Bdubs was certainly breaking in new and exciting ways.

Etho would be feeling fond if he wasn't already imagining the air getting thinner.

The feeling of lightheadedness had probably nothing to do with the announcement, and everything to do with the paranoia that was setting in. Still, it worried him.

Bdubs would only worry if Etho told him, even though it wasn't real. He decided not to mention it just yet.

"Come on, this can wait. O2 is a little more important than some wires." Etho was getting a little impatient.

Was it just him or was taking a breath getting more difficult?

"Ok, coming, coming" Bdubs threw his hands up in defeat. "Let's go fix O2."

“Finally” Etho rolled his eyes, before catching himself against a wall in a sudden spout of dizziness.

The ground was spinning, it had to be. Blinking didn’t really help either, as everything was starting to feel more distant.

Etho sat down on the floor.

If he was going to pass out, Etho would like to not crack his skull in the prosses.

“Are you ok?” Bdubs asked somewhere above him.

Etho showed him a thumbs-up. “Just a little dizzy” he said. “I guess the oxygen-levels are dropping faster than I expected.”

Bdubs crouched down in front of him. Something resembling worry was written over his face.

He mumbled something that Etho did catch. Wow, the lightheadedness was getting to him faster than he had been expecting.

All he heard was Xisuma, the rest was a blur.

There, laying on the floor, minutes from passing out, it struck him.

This was the sign he had been waiting for. The out of the ordinary thing that would reveal his time coming to an end.

Etho was more helpless than he had been in weeks, lack of oxygen meant he had no way to fight back if anything happened.

The O2 had never failed before. They had been on the journey for months now, with no planets in reach for weeks.

If they were going to kill him, this was the perfect opportunity.

Besides, Etho remembered something about imposters needing less oxygen to survive than crewmates. Similar to the way they were carnivores rather than vegetarians.

Etho felt his body become slack as he gave up. There was flight, fight, freeze and fawn. He couldn’t fight nor flee.

What he landed on after that wouldn’t really matter. Not to his friends.

Not when they had already won.

At least Etho had been right in one thing, the hermits would be kind.

A death while unconscious wouldn’t hurt, or be scary, or hold the weight of a betrayal in it.

It would simply be like falling asleep.

Etho felt Bdubs hands placed behind his neck and legs as he was lifted.

A lamb to the slaughter, a sacrifice so that the rest could continue on.

A bite, a snack, a feast.

The meal that would finally be shared among the crew, the lamb eaten, carrying the sins along with him, a feast like no other.

Bdubs was sturdy as he carried Etho. Strong. Much stronger than any crewmate.

The charade didn't matter now, Etho guessed, when Etho was taken to the last place he would ever see. To die among his friends.

The last people to ever see him alive. To ever see him at all, when the cold dark space would entomb him after death.

There was no finding him then.

Bdubs was warm.

It made Etho lean into the carry, trying his best to absorb the heat. He didn't know when he had become cold.

Then he was in a bright room and there were voices talking above.

Medbay, Etho realized.

It made sense. Medbay would be the easiest to clean, it was where most of the tools was too.

He wondered how they would do it.

A knife maybe? Or perhaps a scalpel?

Maybe they would hook him up to some oxygen, keeping him just alive, but unconscious, keeping the meat fresh for as long as possible.

So long he didn't have to feel it, Etho didn't really mind all that much what happened.

He was placed on a bed, a mask put over his face as a beeping started somewhere on his right.

Then, everything went dark.

Chapter 3: A final conversation

Chapter Summary

Bdubs slips up, and they finally talk.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Etho had woken up, the crew had all been there above him in medbay, chattering amongst themselves.

Because they were worried.

Because Etho had just passed out when oxygen went down, and they were his friends.

Add to that, Etho was alive.

Which was a shock to say the least. And he could never tell them about it in fear of actually dying, or making them all think he was truly scared of them.

Neither was things he was particularly keen on doing.

So, he just lay there and listened as Xisuma explained that when O2 went down, before either him or Cleo could fix it, Bdubs had come running in with a barely conscious Etho in his arms.

Then he had gotten a mask with oxygen over his face before passing out.

Which worried the others to say the least. At least it looked like he was going to be making a full recovery.

Xisuma didn't mention when they had fixed O2 in that time. Etho didn't mention it. His friends had saved him, the fact that they didn't need air was not as dire at the moment.

Though he had a tough conversation in front of him if Xisuma, or anybody else for that matter, tried to pretend to be crewmates with anybody else.

In a regular ship, they would all be goners.

Or the crewmates would all be dead, but let's not think too much about that. They were on this ship after all.

Cleo declared that even if nothing was wrong, Etho should take it slow the next couple of days, just in case.

Which meant Etho wouldn't be getting any tasks.

That was fine, even if it meant Etho was going to get a little restless. Maybe he could fix a couple of Bdubs.

Regardless, some alone time would be nice. The crew had been worried, but now that Etho was as good as new, everything would go back to normal.

Or at least Etho had assumed so.

Bdubs immediately proved him wrong by fretting over him the entire stay in the medbay, and then hoovering even after Etho was out.

So, maybe he had scared them a little more than he had realized.

Woops.

At least this proved he was more than just a really elaborate meal. Even if Etho had no idea what to do with the revelation.

This also lead to Bdubs worrying about Ethos breathing every time he was just out of breath, which might be a little bit of an overreaction.

Etho was pretty sure the imposters would feel if the oxygen began to drop, even if they needed it less than him.

Bdubs backed up a little after Cleo chided him for acting like Etho was made out of glass, a thing Etho definitely wasn't supposed to see or hear.

He really should stop spying on people. It was what started this whole mess in the first place. Or at least Ethos awareness of it.

Still, Etho didn't really mind.

It was nice having someone that was there for you, even if it could get a bit much at times.

Xisuma fixed the oxygen, as well as added some extra security measures around it. Etho didn't exactly know what, but chances seemed low that something similar would happen again.

That probably meant oxygen-deprivation wasn't the way Etho was going to go either, but at least he couldn't die by accident now.

Maybe that was why everybody was freaking out; they didn't want their precious meal up and dying before it was time.

Not when they had spent so much energy and time getting everything perfect and making sure he didn't suspect a thing.

Etho had to imagine there were things they wanted to get in order first. Like a place to dump the body. Or the perfect spices to compliment his flesh.

Maybe they wanted some paralyzing agent, or a knock-out gas. Something that would make the affair less painful for Etho.

Maybe they weren't hungry just yet.

It didn't matter. Because Etho wasn't going to be thinking about that, he was going to have a good time with his friends until everything ended and there was no more pretending.

To force his mind off things, Etho was currently with Bdubs, crafting an elaborate plan to get back at Scar for his devious acts.

Etho suspected Bdubs had mostly roped him into it because he was 'looking sad' and 'acting weird', so Bdubs wanted to cheer him up.

Regardless of reasons, it was working.

Etho had eaten a quick breakfast before running off with Bdubs, almost skipping lunch and only eating dinner when Bdubs had sat down with him for the meal.

He hadn't really considered the fact that since Bdubs had been with him the whole day, he hadn't really had any time to eat something himself.

It seemed so unimportant at the time.

Besides, imposters had to eat less often than crewmates, otherwise they would be much easier to spot, right?

Etho had been messing around in security with Bdubs when he felt a little sting in his left arm.

Looking down, he saw a trickle of blood spill out, Etho had cut himself. It didn't look to bad, but it would still mean a visit to medbay.

That's when he heard the unmistakable crackle of bones.

Looking up, Etho could see Bdubs mouth contorting, much like the first time Etho had caught him, widening up an impossible degree as sharp teeth appeared.

Oh, Etho thought.

So this would be it.

It hadn't happened like he had expected.

There had been no warning signs, no clues, nothing that could have told him what was coming.

At least now Etho finally could stop wondering and worrying.

Even if he would be soon dead.

He could see the horror dawning on Bdubs face as he realized exactly what he had done. This clearly wasn't how it was supposed to go down.

It wouldn't matter. Etho wasn't going to be running anyways.

Bdubs was walking towards him, and despite himself, Etho couldn't help backing away.

There was nowhere to run, Bdubs was blocking the door, and Etho felt himself hit the cold hard wall.

"Etho, I can explain" Bdubs voice was shaky. He didn't stop walking.

Soon, everything would end.

All the questions Etho had laid up at night wondering about, all the thoughts desperately pushed to the back of his mind.

Would it hurt?

Etho couldn't help the thought appearing.

Something wet slid down his cheek, was he crying?

He didn't want to die. God, please don't let him die.

He felt his body give as Bdubs approached, sliding down the wall until he was sitting at the floor, curling up in a desperate attempt to disappear.

"Etho" Bdubs started again, standing above him. His voice sounded desperate. "Etho, please"

Etho didn't know what he was asking for.

Bdubs was stronger, had the rest of the crew behind him. Etho stood no chance at either escape or victory here.

It was going to be ok.

Bdubs would be gentle. Etho wouldn't feel a thing.

Please just let it be quick. Just the two of them. He couldn't stand the thought of being dragged alive to the rest, seeing their faces as they all prepared to kill him.

Couldn't stand the betrayal.

Bdubs would be quick. He would hold him as the life drained from Ethos eyes. Would chase away the cold with a heat that didn't dwindle, even if Etho himself was dwindling forever.

“I won’t hurt you” Bdubs promised. He sounded so desperate, like he needed Etho to believe him over anything in the whole world.

He didn’t have to be so worried. Etho wouldn’t fight. Wouldn’t make his last memory a bitter one.

He didn’t flinch when Bdubs leaned down, only shivered when Bdubs cupped his cheek, hands warm with heat.

Etho stared out of dazed eyes. Everything felt so far away all of a sudden.

“Do you understand?” Bdubs asked. “Nothing is going to happen to you, ok?”

“It’s ok” Etho just said, voice scratchy from fear and expectations and betrayal. “It’s ok”

It wasn’t, not at all, but what else could he say.

There was no changing what was about to happen, no way for Etho to make it out alive now.

Bdubs was his best friend, Etho didn’t want to him hurting unnecessarily.

Even when he was Ethos killer.

“I have known for a while now anyways” Etho continued, the story spilling from his mouth after months of secrecy.

It felt like a relief, finally saying the words out loud.

“I saw you” gulp “eat something out of the hallway-wall a couple of months back. After that, the rest of the pieces weren’t too hard to place.”

Bdubs seemed frozen in place from the sudden confession. Then, his face softened.

“Oh” he just said.

There it was, proof that this was always the plan, always the ploy that Etho had suspected.

It felt more hollow than Etho had expected.

Bdubs smiled at him, showing off the horrifying rows of teeth lining his mouth. Sharp enough to break bone.

Etho could practically see them tearing into him, breaking of parts of tissue with no issue, eating his tough meat as like it was the most tender thing.

He wondered how he would taste. Irony, surely?

Did imposters have a different sense of taste, which meant that tasted good? That had so have, surely. Etho couldn’t imagine being able to stand it otherwise. Raw, none the less.

Maybe this was going to be ending a lot quicker than Etho expected.

He had always imagined Bdubs as gentle when he finally did the deed, but maybe he wouldn't be.

Maybe he would just start ripping out chunks of flesh with his too sharp teeth, Etho still alive and screaming.

"I have known I was going to die since that." Etho finished, voice breaking off. It was the confession on his deathbed, confessing his sins before death came to take him.

Now, there was nothing left to do but wait for the dark to claim him.

"I am so relieved to hear-" Bdubs started, before freezing mid-sentence. "Wait, what?"

The range of emotions quickly flashing over Bdubs face would be funny if Etho wasn't feel so hopeless, and so utterly confused.

Surely they were currently on the same page, right?

Even if that page would bring about Ethos untimely demise.

Shock was first up, followed by a crazed smile, flashing past realization and sadness, finally settling on horror.

"Etho" Bdubs tried again, his voice suddenly quiet and gentle, like he was just waiting for Etho to break down any minute.

Why did it hurt so much?

Etho knew that Bdubs cared, just that he didn't care enough. What right did Bdubs realization have to feel like a knife plunged into his stomach?

Why did he have to look so sad?

Bdubs kneeled down next to him, still holding onto him. He tipped Ethos' face so that they looked eye to eye.

Bdubs scanned his face for something, though by now Etho had no what. Etho had started shaking, adrenaline finally catching up to him.

Whatever Bdubs found, Etho could see the way his face fell at it, the way his eyes filled with heavy grief.

"Oh" he said again, far quieter now. Like he was scared Etho would crumble to dust in his hands.

Right now, Etho felt just as vulnerable.

"I" Bdubs said, his voice breaking. "I am so sorry"

Etho had many a night imagined this scene, Bdubs apologizing before plunging a knife into his heart, Ethos blood spilling everywhere.

Never like this though.

Never with so much pain and sorrow behind it. Never in such a gentle manner.

“It’s ok” Ethos just repeated.

Even when it wasn’t, because Bdubs was his friend and because it had to be. Because if it wasn’t, Etho was going to break into a million little pieces and never be able to glue himself back together.

“No, it’s not” Bdubs said.

Etho broke.

Tears started falling from his eyes like heavy rain and he sobbed, feeling like someone was ripping his heart out.

Why did it have to hurt so badly?

Why couldn’t Bdubs just kill him and get it over with?

“God, Etho. It’s not ok.” Bdubs voice was breaking now. “And I am so fucking sorry.”

Etho felt too much, all at once. Terrified for his upcoming death. Confusion at the sudden turn of events. Pain from a betrayal and for making his friend hurt.

It conflicted and clashed, until Etho wanted nothing but to rip his skin off until nothing could ever hurt again.

“I am not going to kill, Etho. You have to know that. I was never going to kill you. Please, you have to know that.”

Bdubs voice was shaking, begging for Etho to agree, for him to tell him this was all just a twisted joke.

Etho couldn’t.

“You aren’t?” he asked, almost like a prayer, not being able to hide the doubt creeping into his voice.

“Never” Bdubs responded, so final, like there was no doubt at all.

Maybe there wasn’t.

Maybe there had never been.

Etho didn’t know anymore. Didn’t know if he believed him, if he could believe him. Didn’t know if it was true.

Unable to do anything to stop the shaking and the terror.

“Then why am I the only crewmate?” Etho asked. The question felt forbidden, yet he couldn’t stop himself from asking it.

Tasting what was forbidden, savoring the taste of the apple which would get him thrown out and killed.

Because if Etho wasn’t in danger, why did everything point to it being true.

Why had he spent months feeling like nothing but a lamb among wolves, a sacrifice just waiting for the knife?

Why had anything ever occurred, if it wasn’t because he was food?

So Etho asked, because he had to, consequences be dammed. He could see the look of realization dawning of Bdubs face as he processed just what Etho had asked him.

As the true scope of Ethos damage was suddenly all too clear.

“We just found each other” he said “Imposters can usually tell, even when the crewmates can’t. We realized that we didn’t want to kill each other, added with the danger of getting voted out and killed, when Xisuma got a ship, joining was only natural.” Bdubs voice was heavy as he explained.

“What did you-” Bdubs paused before asking the question. “God, Etho, don’t tell me that was what you thought”

Bdubs was begging now, pleading for Etho to tell him he was wrong.

Etho could only shrug.

“It was a natural conclusion” he just said, voice meek.

Because what else was he supposed to say. That he hadn’t spent months scared for his life, imagining how getting his flesh torn off would feel.

That he hadn’t thought his best friend, and everybody else too, was going to kill him like he was nothing, and still spent time around them, smiling.

Bdubs face looked like Etho had just shattered his heart. He dropped his hands down, Etho mourned the warmth.

I’m sorry, he wanted to say.

Even if he hadn’t done anything wrong.

I am sorry for being such an idiot, and I am sorry for not trusting you. You deserve better than this.

He didn't, because Etho had a feeling Bdubs wouldn't exactly like this new line of thinking.

"God" Bbubs just said again. "And you still spent time around us."

"What else was there to do?" Etho just asked him. "There was no way of the ship, and you were my friends. I liked being around you, all of you."

It felt like everything around Etho was slowly being torn away, like thread for a stitch made in flaw, that was now being unraveled.

Etho felt like everything was spinning again, like the time with the O2, except everything was standing as still as ever as he struggled.

"Even after everything? Even after you thought we were going to kill, and then fucking eat your dead remains?"

Bdubs voice was harsh now, anger replacing pain and horror.

Etho cringed the description.

It had what he been expecting all these months, but to hear it without any reasoning, or imagery that would make everything ok, the force of the words felt grotesque.

Like a dull knife digging into a stomach.

Like friends killing him just for the thrill of it, because he was nothing but food to them. Because he didn't really matter.

"I'm sorry" Bdubs said, voice now much quieter again. "I just. You understand how this feels right. My best friend spent months thinking I was going to slaughter him like cattle, and you still chose to spend time with me."

"I'm sorry" Etho apologized. What else could he really say.

"This is not your fault" Bdubs voice was stern. "And you do not need to apologize for it."

The sudden shift made Etho want to smile, it was so similar to how Bdubs made disapproving sounds when he forgot to eat.

I know, Etho wanted to say. That much I know. I am not that broken.

He couldn't get the words to leave his mouth. They felt too much like a lie at the moment.

Bdubs didn't seem to expect Etho to say anything either. Maybe he knew just how messed up his friend truly was.

"Could you-" Bdubs started, voice wavering. "Do you think you could ever find it in yourself to forgive me? To forgive all of us for being such idiots and hurting you so much?"

A tear rolled down Bdubs cheek as he asked. Clearly expecting Etho to declare that no, he would never forgive them.

Etho just smiled sadly at him. “I already did. All those months ago.”

Another tear rolled down his face, and Etho didn’t know if he was crying from relief or horror.

“It’s going to be ok” Bdubs said instead of reacting to Ethos confession. “We are going to make this ok, no matter how long or painful of a prosses it might be.”

Tears were streaming down both their faces now, and surely they had to look like a mess.

Luckily, the rest of the crew were helping Xisuma fixing something in electrical, so they wouldn’t have any spectators at least.

God, the rest of the crew.

Etho would have to tell them, wouldn’t he. That he believed every single one to be nothing but a killer.

Somebody capable of killing a close friend, capable of killing him.

Etho just hoped he could get Bdubs to do most of the talking. He didn’t know how much energy he had left after the event that was currently unfolding around him.

“I believe you” Etho told Bdubs.

The words felt so final, but Etho meant it. Bdubs was his closest friend, if he promised that everything would be ok again, Etho couldn’t do anything but believe him.

“Can I hug you?” Bdubs asked, voice once again uncertain.

Etho was about to ask why his voice was wavering again, before remembering the guy had just been told Etho had full faith in his ability to commit murder against his best friend, and then live with himself afterwards.

Maybe he was scared Etho wouldn’t want Bdubs touching him after spending months being scared of him. Maybe he was scared all touch had secretly been painful, making Etho think about his inevitable demise.

Bdubs worried too much.

Etho was tired and sad, tears covering his face, the salt burning his face ever so slightly, and he was cold.

A hug sounded about the best thing he could get about now. Especially since Bdubs was so warm.

“Please” Ethos answered.

Then arms enveloped him, holding him close and protecting him.

Bdubs was warm, so wonderfully warm, and Etho could let his body go slack, resting his head on Bdubs chest, hearing his heartbeat as Etho cried.

It felt safe.

There were no monsters now, no danger lurking around the next corner, just friends who would surely be worried about him.

And that was going to be ok.

Because Bdubs had promised, and Etho could do nothing but believe him.

Chapter End Notes

Writing this has genuinly made me sad, mulitple times. I just really needed this to be ok, for Etho to be told he was wrong, but that he wasn't crazy for being such. Hope you liked this. I think this is genuinly the fastest I have ever finished a story of this length. I started thursday, and finished now on a saturday. Woops. At least you get the final story fast. Comments and kudos give me motivation and they make me genuinly happy. Hope you have a good day/night and please take care of yourself.

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